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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews two studies, published in 1972 and in 1974, that dealt with women's roles in television advertising, and it reports on a study of men's and women's roles in 595 television commercials shown in the Rochester, New York, area during March 1974. Results are presented with regard to the sex of the voice-over announcer, the sex of the persons pictured in the commercial, and the types of products advertised by men and by women. Among the findings are that, although female voice-over announcers are in the minority, there has been an increase in the percentage of female voice-over announcers since the earlier two studies were conducted; women appear as product representatives as often as do men, but women in television commercials are most often portrayed in the roles of wife and mother, are frequently presented as rather stupid, and are limited with regard to their occupations and the physical areas they inhabit. (GW)

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An Analysis of the Roles of Women and Men in Television Commercials

Barbara Combes Ingrassia and Margaret W. Matlin

S.U.N.Y. at Geneseo

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Barbara Combes Ingrassia

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Margaret W. Matlin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

[1]The data for this study were collected by the first author for a course in Psychology of Women, taught at S.U.N.Y. at Geneseo by the second author.

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Little research has been devoted to the topic of women in television advertisements. Concern for violence in television has produced extensive research on that topic; in contrast, sex stereotyping has been virtually ignored. In fact, we could find only two published studies on the topic of sex stereotyping in television advertisements, although less formal investigations undoubtedly exist.

An analysis by Dominick and Rauch (1972) examined prime-time television commercials which appeared on the network flagship stations in New York City during Spring, 1971. Coders analyzed advertisements featuring females and, several weeks later, they analyzed a comparison sample of advertisements featuring males. The results demonstrated that ads featuring women concerned personal hygiene 15% of the time, while ads without women concerned personal hygiene only 2% of the time; the difference was statistically significant. Furthermore, women were much less likely than men to appear in ads for cars, trucks, and related products. Thus, women can contemplate toothpaste and attempt to sell it to television viewers, but they are presumed to have no credibility in selling a car. Not only was there a limit to what women could sell, but there was also a restriction on where they can be while selling it. As the authors states succinctly, "A woman's place is in the home." This difference, too, was statistically significant; females were pictured in the home 38% of the time, while males were in the home 14% of the time. In contrast, men were pictured much more frequently in a business setting (14% versus 7%) and outside (44% versus 19%). Advertisements seem to be capitalizing on Erik Eriksen's "inner space" (Eriksen, 1964).

Not surprisingly, occupations were portrayed quite differently for the two sexes. Of those people who were judged to have an occupation, 56% of the women were tallied as housewives. The equivalent category of husband and/or father was occupied by only 14% of the men. Inspection of Dominick and Rauch's data shows that women were seldom represented in nonstereotyped roles. There were 2 businesswomen among the 230 working females in the sample, but the rest of the women were teachers, stewardesses, secretaries, etc. Males had far more diversified occupa-

tional alternatives, from lawyer and pilot to professional athlete and, intriguingly, criminal.

Other findings in the Dominick and Rauch study were the following: 1) Women in the advertisements tended to be younger than the men; 2) Women were not typically placed in commercials simply as sex objects, and 3) The off-camera, voice-over announcer was a male voice 87% of the time, a chorus 7% of the time, and female only 6% of the time. This last observation is particularly interesting, as it provides statistical confirmation for the observation by Suelzle (1970) that commercials "endlessly show women helpless before a pile of soiled laundry until the male voice of authority overrides hers to tell how brand X with its fast-acting enzymes will get her clothes cleaner than clean."

The second article concerned with women's roles in television commercials (Courtney & Whipple, 1974) reviews the results of four studies on this topic, the Dominick and Rauch sample from 1971, two studies in 1972 by N.O.W. chapters, and one in 1973 by Courtney and Whipple. The studies confirm the Dominick and Rauch observations regarding the predominance of male voice-overs. Encouragingly, however, females are being shown just as often as men in the more recent studies; this percentage increased significantly between 1971 and 1973. Women are apparently seen, but they still aren't heard! (Incidentally, however, women predominate in daytime advertisements while men predominate at night.)

In an analysis of the type of product advertised, Courtney and Whipple found that females still sell female cosmetics and household products, but men sell drugs and medicine. The four studies differed with respect to the description of the other categories, and so the data could not be compared extensively. Other conclusions from this study were that men were once again represented as older than women. Also, women were still overrepresented in family/home settings and underrepresented with respect to job variety. Again, men were outside. When men did venture into the home, they did so only to "give the orders and advice and eat the meals." As the authors conclude, "The world for women in the ads is a domestic one,

where women are housewifes who worry about cleanliness and food preparation and serve their husbands and children. Seldom is a woman shown combining out-of-home employment with management of her home and personal life." In contrast, "Men are portrayed as the dominant sex in the promotion of most products and services which are significant to the family and where the decision-making process is at all extensive."

We feel that it is particularly unfortunate that this area of research has been neglected, with the exception of the Dominick and Rauch (1972) and the Courtney and Whipple (1974) studies, because of the implications for the socialization of children. A recent experiment by Frue and McGhee (1975) found that acceptance of traditional sex roles, as assessed by the Brown it Scale, was greater for children who were classified as high television watchers (25 or more hours per week) than it was for low television watchers (10 or less hours per week). Although other interpretations of these data are available, one explanation may be that extensive television viewing encourages children to accept the roles portrayed on television. It seems clear from other research (Sternglanz & Serbin, 1974) that sex role stereotyping is pronounced in children's television programs. Combining this stereotyping with the stereotyping evident in advertisements, it is no surprise that children are learning something about our society and its norms and expectations from these advertisements.

We feel, then, that it is important to gather additional data on the issue of women's roles in advertising for two reasons. First of all, the way in which women are portrayed in television ads will reflect how women are viewed in a given society. Thus, we can view television advertisements as archival records of sex roles. Furthermore, since television seems to play an important role in the socialization of children, children will grow up viewing women in that same light.

Our study represents, essentially, a replication of these earlier studies in order to establish a reliable data base. Previous studies have examined advertisements in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Toronto. We feel that a sample from

a smaller city with a large surrounding rural area (Rochester, New York) can provide some contrast and offer us information about the generality of these earlier data. Also, the data were collected one year later; perhaps advertisers may finally recognize the arguments proposed by the feminist movement.

METHOD

The senior author tabulated every advertisement that appeared during the periods in which the study was conducted in March, 1974. Table 1 describes the sample.

Table 1 about here

Each advertisement was described briefly and coded for the hour and type of show in which it appeared. Additional codes represented the sex of the voice-over announcer, the sex of the person pictured in the advertisement, and the type of product advertised.

RESULTS

First let us consider the results for the sex of the voice-over announcer at the end of the advertisement. We calculated from Dominick and Rauch's (1972) statistics that their sample must have included approximately 822 (87%) male voice-overs, 57 (6%) female voice-overs, and 66 (7%) mixed chorus voice-overs. In our sample, there were a total of 544 advertisements with a voice-over. Of these, 430 (79%) were males, 94 (17%) were females, and 20 (4%) were mixed chorous. For purposes of this analysis, we ignored the mixed chorus data, leaving it to others to explore the apparent demise of this form.

Two questions interested us regarding the voice-over data. First, has the percentage of female voice-overs increased since the Dominick and Rauch study? A chi-square analysis indicated that this percentage had increased substantially ($X^2 = 43.41$, $df = 1$, $p<.001$). Now it is possible that the difference between our results and those of Dominick and Rauch can be attributed to the fact that their advertisements were from prime time while our sample included daytime television

advertisements. However, an inspection of our prime-time subsample showed that the percentages here did not differ from those in our overall sample. It is also possible that regional differences might be responsible for the difference, but we see no a priori reaseon to predict more female representation in the Upstate New York sample. It seems, then, that more recent television commercials are more likely to select a female to provide the voice over; three years after the Dominick and Rauch study, women are more likely to provide the authoritative last word.

We can also ask a second question: in the present sample, are males and females equally represented in voice overs? The answer here is clearly "No" ($X^2 = 258$, $df = 1$, $p<.001$).

A second category of data concerns the presence of men and women as product representatives. In order to remain as consistent as possible with the Dominick and Rauch study, a single tally mark was recorded for females for each ad containing one or more females (whether adult or child); the same process was followed for males. Thus, a given ad could be tallied for both males and females. In all, 293 ads showed females and 271 ads showed males. Females are in the slight majority in our sample, but this predominance is not statistically significant ($X^2 = .86$, $df = 1$, $p>.05$). These statistics agree with those cited in the 1973 Toronto sample (Courtney and Whipple, 1974) where 50% of those pictured were female.

Let us now consider the product categories of the advertisements (see Table 2).

Table 2 about here

We examined the five categories included in the Dominick and Rauch table. (These are the first five categories in our Table 2). We also added additional categories examined in the Courtney and Whipple study. Thus, we have categories which will allow comparisons with both earlier studies. We added one final category, "financial" because we thought this might reveal some interesting sex differences.

Not surprisingly, females outnumber males in female cosmetic ads. Also, males

outnumbered females in car ads. Both of these findings run parallel to the results of Dominick and Rauch. However, unlike Dominick and Rauch, we found no differences for male cosmetics and gas & oil, because we found so few ads for these items in our sample. Also, we found no difference in the personal hygiene products category; Dominick and Rauch found a difference but Courtney and Whipple did not in their more recent study. Concern about cleanliness in ads is no longer confined to females; men (reluctantly) discuss deodorants, use Lava soap, and smile bright toothpaste smiles.

The one category which Dominick and Rauch did not examine which showed a substantial sex difference was "household," a category composed largely of household cleaning aids. While personal cleanliness is now appropriate for both sexes, household cleanliness is still largely the concern of women. Women are continually being delighted in advertisements by shiney floors, shiney tables, shiney dishes. This difference matches the data of Courtney and Whipple in their 1973 sample.

Finally, we found no difference in the areas of food and beverages, drugs and medicine, and financing. This last finding is encouraging: women are pictured in financial transactions as often as men are, although the nature of these transactions may well be different.

DISCUSSION

We find it particularly encouraging that there has been an increase in the last few years in the percentage of female announcers providing the final information on products. There seems to be a trend to allow women to demonstrate their expertise, especially in the more traditional areas. For example, an ad for Pampers diapers shows a father, grandfather and a baby. The father suggests a Pampers diaper. This ad, so far, runs counter to traditional stereotypes, but will buyers trust a male on such a strictly female topic? Indeed, in this ad, it is a woman announcer who explains why Pampers are the superior product. A more refined comparison of our data with those of Dominick and Rouch might reveal which areas are most likely to yield to the female voice-over. We suspect that it is the traditionally feminine areas.

Of course, our enthusiasm for the change is modified by the fact that women voice-overs are still in the minority, even in some clearly feminine ads, as for Dove soap, or for ads dealing with sex-stereotyped areas, such as toilet bowl cleaners. Quite often, males become involved in ads at the point where a "scientific" explanation seems necessary (perhaps because men are assumed to be more trustworthy, believeable, and knowledgeable) to corroborate the more "personal testimonial" of the women.

It is clear that women are now well represented with regard to the number of times they appear as product representatives. This is in contrast to the situation in elementary school readers, in which males outnumber females both as main characters and in illustrations (Graebner, 1972; Marten & Matlin, 1975). In these readers, females have been called "invisible" because of their scarcity. In contrast, television advertisements picture females as often as males. The complaint comes, instead, from the way in which they are represented. We demonstrated that they appear significantly more often for household products and less often for cars, which are costly "male " products.

Turning from the quantitative analyses, let us consider, more generally, how women are portrayed in advertisements. As a whole, they represented in their traditional role as a wife and mother, perhaps not too intelligent a wife and at that. They are seen being surprised by lower food prices and cleaner dishes and floors, forcing their children to gargle, wrapping sandwiches, cooking soup, buying toothpaste, and going wild over hats. The woman is busy every minute, but she loves it--because she takes her Geritol.

Our sample of advertisements supports the conclusion of Dominick and Rauch that females are not placed in commercials merely as sex objects (perhaps this tendency would be stronger in magazine advertisements). We found a sexy female actor-announcer floating among bank premiums, a woman who nightly slinks forth in a low-cut frothy white gown to announce the specials or movies for the evening on the NBC Network, and the L'Oreal Hair Color woman, who is attacked by a

handsome male after spurging $2.75 on herself. Aside from these, television females are not especially sexy.

The women in television commercials may not be sexy; instead, they seem pitifully dumb. One woman forgets, even after she has been told many times, that only a certain dog food contains beef, and another can't seem to understand the intricacies of decaffeinated coffee. Another young woman is completely forgetful of the fact that she has a credit card to pay for her car repairs. She is utterly helpless until a man reminds her of her credit card. One other woman, to her credit, does begin to put up her own curtains, until her arthritis stops her.

Women also seem to be restricted with regard to the physical areas they can inhabit. We did not investigate this interesting question, as the earlier studies did, but we note a Windex ad in which a man and a woman are washing a window. The man is on the outside and the woman is on the inside.

The feminist movement seems to have little effect on how advertisers represent women's occupations. In our sample, we saw only four working women, a teacher, a librarian, a golf instructor, and Josephine the Plumber. We are pleased to see these last two non-stereotyped occupations. However, we note that Josephine has been around for many years, and she is still in the kitchen.

Females are also portrayed as limited and helpless in the advertisements specifically directed at children. Again, the vast majority of the announcers are men—or, in the case of the humorous cartoons ads, male voices. Boys and girls are once again cast in traditional roles. In an ad for a candy bar, a little boy is seen having just climbed a mountain and placed a flag on it, while a girl swoops in on a flying carpet. Buster Brown makes Dashers for boys and Dumplings for girls. In another ad, a boy and a girl are about to begin a game of baseball when it is pointed out that one of them is a girl, and so they can't play. The girl replies that at least she likes to take baths!

It is possible, though, that the feminist movement has had some specific influence on a small number of ads featuring men. One man does laundry. Another

man fries chicken and receives the compliment, "Not bad, Dad." Yet another father makes soup for the family. His little daughter days, "Dad" I didn't know you could cook," and Dad replies, "Neither did I." In another example, a woman goes back to work but she assures us that her home won't suffer because her husband uses Mop & Glow on the floors. She comments, "Isn't he terrific!" It seems that men can be shown in female-role ads, but there must be some surprise indicated. They never simply stir soup, as their wives would in similar circumstances. Men are performing female tasks, but this is still so unusual that it deserves special comment. Bem and Bem (1971) have noted that we can test for equality of sex roles by reversing the sex of the characters and seeing whether the description retains the same flavor and tone as the original. Trying this test on these ads, we see that men may be performing womanly duties, but the "flavor" is somehow different; this performance is not part of the man's customary duties. No mother would receive the comment, "Mom, I didn't know you could cook," nor would she reply, "Neither did I." Incidentally, we wonder why there is no equivalent advertisement portraying a woman in a male role, whether with or without comment.

CONCLUSION

In the last three years, there has been some improvement in the way women are represented in television advertisements, but obviously the situation is still far from ideal. We still await an advertisement showing a really competent woman, one who can comment authoritatively on a product without the last word being spoken by the ultimate, male expert.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample of advertisements

Type of Time Slot	Total # of Hours	Total # of Ads	Type of Show	Total # of Hours	Total # of Ads
Morning	10	214	Variety	4	83
Afternoon	7.5	192	Soap Opera	5.5	146
Evening	11	189	Movie	4.5	79
			Talk	4.5	92
			Cartoon	4.5	93
			Game	1.2	32
			Sit. Com.	2.5	39
			News	1.8	31

Table 2: Product Categories of Advertisements

Product Category	Ads with Females	Ads with Males	Level of Significance of Difference
1. Male cosmetics	0%	0%	n.s.
2. Female cosmetics	5%	1%	<.01
3. Cars, related products	5%	10%	<.05
4. Gas and oil	1%	1%	n.s.
5. Personal hygiene products	15%	14%	n.s.
6. Household	19%	7%	<.01
7. Food and beverage	33%	36%	n.s.
8. Drugs and medicine	6%	5%	n.s.
Financial	2%	3%	n.s.
Other	14%	21%	n.s.
Total	100%	100%	
N(total ads)	293	271	

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